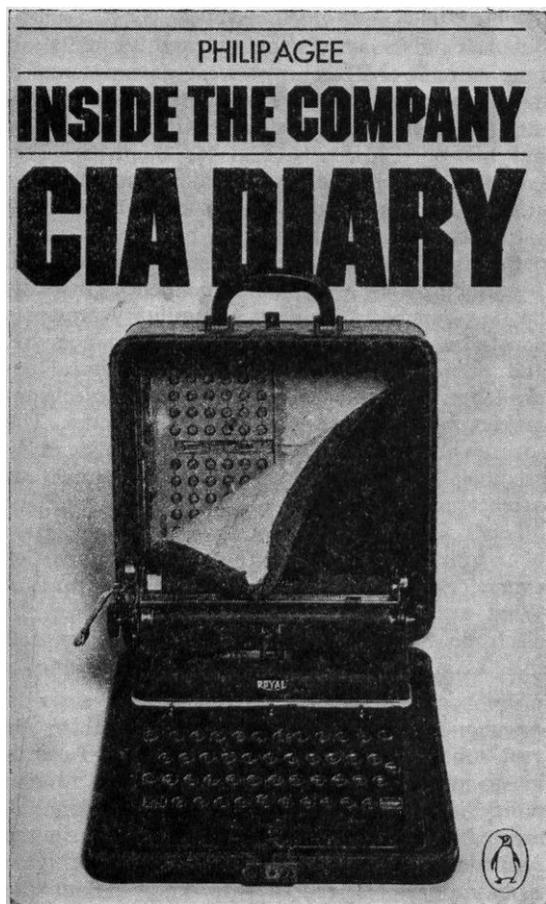


Book Reviews



The CIA and the social sciences: the contribution of Mr Agee.

*Inside the Company: CIA Diary.*¹
Philip Agee, Penguin, 1975, £1.00.
Dudley Seers

This book has not been getting adequate professional notice, especially in the journals. Many social scientists have read it with varying degrees of approval but as far as I know very few, if any, treat it as relevant to their models. Yet it is no longer professionally defensible to ignore the CIA. What the book describes is outside intervention sufficiently powerful to influence the balance of political forces in several Latin

American countries, thus shaping their foreign policies, the patterns of their economic growth and their social structures.²

It falls into three sections. The first (1956-60) is an account of the recruitment and training of a CIA agent, which brings out the attractions of this career, especially for someone liable to be conscripted for Vietnam, and its underlying political philosophy. The reader is struck by how much the original and legal purpose, information gathering and analysis, has been supplemented by a new and illegal one, covert intervention in the politics of foreign countries, using advanced technology.

The second, taking up the bulk of the book, is about the operations of CIA 'stations' in the years 1960-68 in Ecuador, Uruguay and Mexico. This is an important primary source on both US policy in Latin America and the internal politics of these three countries.

The last section includes the author's own appraisal of the agency and describes his efforts from 1968-74, mostly in Paris and London, to write this exposure, "helped" by various "friends", some of whom turned out to be CIA agents trying to stop the book being published and to silence the author. (This section would make an exciting film.)

The emphasis on the work the author had to do before writing the book raises some questions about its value as a primary source. The diary format is, as the introduction acknowledges, simply an *ex post* artifice: "intensive research" was needed to "reinforce my own recollections." This device (seemingly unnecessary) might be taken to justify the lack of professional notice. But although no doubt there are minor errors, and perhaps the author's perceptions were less naive at the time than he now remembers, there is not much reason to question the general picture that emerges. The known framework of US Latin American policy in the 1960s is as depicted here. Subsequent Congressional hearings have provided evidence quite consistent with what

¹ This was written before the recent deportation order against the author. I benefited from the comments of several colleagues at IDS.

² An earlier exposure, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* by Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks (UK edition: Jonathan Cape, 1974) was marred by numerous deletions to meet the requirements of US government censorship. In any case, it does not contain nearly so much field material—Marchetti worked for the CIA in Washington and Marks was in the State Department. However, its interesting data on general CIA policies and practices are broadly consistent with Agee's book.

Agee describes.³ Naming dozens of CIA officials, agents, cover organisations and operations add conviction.

For the general reader this is a repugnant story. Ministers are bribed, arrests arranged of radical and reformist leaders, enemy agents provided with girl-friends and blackmailed, rumours manufactured and spread, journalists and editors bought, generals and admirals induced to commit treason, terrorists subsidised, workers paid to form breakaway unions, student associations destroyed and new ones established, police forces equipped with the latest electrical gadgetry.⁴

In the early years of his CIA career, Mr Agee believed that these means were justified by the ends, a combination of democracy and social reform, as outlined in the documents of the Alliance for Progress. Thwarting Communism, especially Cuban and Soviet foreign policy, was a pre-condition for achieving them. But he noticed that it was this condition which was in fact treated as the real objective. Much effort, for example, was spent buying support throughout the hemisphere for the CIA-organised Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, and financing parties and politicians who favoured breaking off diplomatic relations with Cuba. On the other hand, the agency devoted no resources at all to arranging for the exile or imprisonment of powerful land-owners: it did not even bother to invent any rumours or pay any journalists to discredit them. Indeed, it was so keen to prevent hostile or even non-aligned governments from taking power that it backed those who were most corrupt and reactionary, especially in the armed forces, and used any means, however sordid, to support them. The author was in the end sickened. It was a traumatic experience to hear the groans of a man being tortured by the Uruguayan secret police and realise it was someone he had himself denounced. Another was the massacre of students in Mexico City (just before the 1968 Olympic games) by a government whose President, Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, was a "close collaborator of the Mexico City station."⁵

³ CIA operations in Chile are described in detail in *Hearings before the Select Committee to study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the US Senate*, Vol. 7 *Covert Action* especially Appendix *Covert Action in Chile 1963-1973: Staff Report*, US Government Printing Office, 1976.

⁴ Of course, as became revealed in the closing months of the Nixon regime, CIA techniques began to seep back into the USA itself, as has happened elsewhere (cf. OAS operations in France). Indeed the agency became an accomplice in some of President Nixon's illegal activities, both directly and through former agents such as Howard Hunt.

⁵ The author contrasts the agency's activities pointedly with the public plea of its former director, Richard Helms: "You've got to trust us. We are honourable men."

Social scientists are, one would like to think, not immune from moral revulsion either, despite the inroads of positivism, but we have another concern as well: how the material in this book affects our models, in the sense of broad theoretical frameworks.

Scholars in many disciplines (and virtually all international civil servants) treat governments, if only implicitly, as sovereign and genuine spokesmen for their nation's interest. Others, especially but not only Marxists, also see them as representative, although only of a dominant class or at least social coalition. The assumption that they speak for any national interest, however narrowly defined, has already been partially undermined by the growing work of 'dependence' theorists on how economic, political and military pressures constrain a government's room to manoeuvre, and even more by recent work on cultural dependence, the moulding of the minds of decision-makers by imported theories and attitudes. The sovereignty of a government becomes scarcely credible at all when we learn that numerous cabinet ministers and senior civil and military officials are salaried employees of an agency of another government (not all of them, of course, conscious of the true source of funds).⁶ What exactly is 'the State' in such a case? An electrode has been implanted in the cortex and this as always throws doubt on the subject's identity.

Another fundamental question is raised about the very substance of international relations. According to material presented in this book, US foreign policy in many key fields is decided and implemented by the CIA, leaving ambassadors in the countries concerned largely ritual functions. (One ambassador preferred not to know about the activities of the agency.)⁷ To study treaties, speeches and other official documents may be dangerously misleading, when the most important elements in international behaviour are clandestine activities in this 'informal sector' of diplomacy.

Questions are also raised about analyses on a national plane. It is clear that a study of Ecuadorian politics would hardly be scientifically defensible unless it took account of the CIA as a causal factor, whatever the model used. This applies to micro-level research too. If a political

⁶ A President must often look around the Cabinet room and wonder which of his colleagues is also on the payroll. To paraphrase Stanley Baldwin, who once claimed that he had formed a Cabinet of which Harrow could be proud, Ecuador at this time had a Cabinet which was a credit to the CIA.

⁷ On the other hand, Ambassador Korry knew of and supported most of the covert CIA actions against Allende. *Select Committee Hearings op cit.*

historian wanted to explain why (say) bombs were placed in churches in Cuenca (9/1/62) or Guayaquil (20/1/62), research should start by an interview with the then chief of the CIA station on his objectives, how he expected bombing to help achieve them, how he evaluated the results, etc. Since even identifying him will not normally be possible, much research inevitably misses the main factors—and CIA officials must often be amused at the naivety of social scientists.

It appears from this book that the agency's influence is usually decisive. A clearly definable pattern can be seen in its procedures for destroying governments it considers unhelpful to US interests. The process by which Arosemena was overthrown by the Ecuadorian military shows a strong formal similarity with the pattern of later coups d'état which demolished the governments of Jagan in Guyana, Goulart in Brazil and (especially) Allende in Chile.⁸ Trade unions are created or stimulated to organise strikes which disrupt economic life;⁹ press articles and leaflets are circulated to whip up hysteria and undermine law and order; provocateurs are hired to set off explosions and start riots; officers in the armed forces are supplied with up-to-date hardware and bribes; plans for a Communist revolution are forged, planted and brought to light at a convenient moment.¹⁰ The very counter-moves provoked (imports of arms from communist countries, censorship, etc.) fit the propaganda line and help stimulate and justify a military take-over. A high priority in research should, in fact, be to explore this pattern of CIA-engineered changes of government: it would be of help to governments to whom the same treatment might be applied in the future¹¹—including, possibly, some in Europe.

⁸ An earlier example, perhaps the model, was the overthrow of the Arbenz administration in Guatemala in the 1950s, except that this involved military invasion (with the complicity of the government of Nicaragua).

⁹ One major contribution of the book is to show the strength of CIA influence in unions, in co-operation with the AFL/CIO, especially through its control of ORIT, the Latin American regional organisation of the WCFTU. This evidence tends to support world models, such as those of Sunkel, which treat the industrial proletariat in modern sectors as basically 'transnational' and therefore non-revolutionary, in contrast to Marxist models. However, one could argue that CIA intervention is so powerful that the behaviour of organised labour (viz. the strike of Chilean copper workers against the Allende government) is evidence more of the agency's influence than of new class alliances.

¹⁰ Meanwhile USAID and the Export-Import Bank cut off financial support and US representatives endeavour to get international agencies, such as IBRD and the Inter-American Development Bank, to do the same.

¹¹ International agencies would be rendering a service by providing technical assistance to improve security against clandestine operations organised by foreign governments, although of course the governments most in need of such help may be too heavily infiltrated to request it. Agencies are in any case hardly autonomous enough to provide such assistance.

Once in power, the new military governments have to rely heavily on imported capital, especially private capital, although substantial aid also suddenly becomes available. This is also true of governments which have come to power with less evident CIA support, but which use its help subsequently in ruthless suppression of egalitarian political forces—as in most of Latin America now. The reader of this book would look askance at sociological projects designed to explain the extent to which poverty is caused by the attitudes and customs of the poor. The poor are poor, he would conclude, because the CIA believes that this suits US interests. The situation in the region, especially the 'southern cone', seems stabilised in the long-term interests of US foreign policy (at least on the CIA's interpretation of this). Indeed there appears to be a sort of transnationalisation of counter-insurgency. A group of governments are determined to eliminate, expel or demoralise a whole generation of reformist and revolutionary intellectuals, with their own security forces aided by CIA training, equipment and facilities for exchanging information. This is the counter-part to what is seen as a transnational threat of communism.

In such circumstances the economists in planning offices could only affect the pattern of growth marginally, however sophisticated their techniques, even if they were allowed a more than ritualistic role.¹² (Sophistication would merely mask irrelevance.) Purely economic analysis is in fact trivial: a function in which the only exogenous variables are economic is technically mis-specified. For this reason, lectures on (say) economic development which left out the CIA would be biased.

So would any text on official statistics which did the same. It would be interesting to know where CIA transactions (a) should (b) do appear in the balance of payments or estimates of personal income, and similarly for CIA agents in statistics of employment. Presumably a statistician who had the data would construct a separate table for its activities in a system of national accounts. It would make an interesting example for a UN statistical manual (eg on the System of National Accounts), of an 'informal' sector the dimensions of which have to be guessed.¹³ But for purposes of aggregative measures of welfare what is its 'output'—and in principle should this be considered a 'final' product?

¹² Actually the Minister of Economics in Ecuador was a CIA agent, and the Minister of Planning an unpaid collaborator.

¹³ Are there, one wonders, any proxies one could use—eg 'deaths due to unidentifiable causes', numbers of automobiles owned by cabinet ministers?

Questions are also raised by statistics of law enforcement. Some arrests, convictions, imprisonments, executions, are for universally recognised crimes, such as robbery or murder for personal gain. But in many countries (eg Chile), they cover those who merely have the wrong political views. Indeed, in the 'southern cone' of Latin America, many of the murders are done by agents of the state themselves (often in plain clothes), or by vigilantes—the informal gendarmerie—and remain unrecorded.

Another example: aid is usually treated as sufficiently homogeneous to be summed. Yet what is the meaning of statistics, such as those published by OECD, adding Swedish (or British) assistance for Kenyan rural development to US 'public safety' aid to improve police interrogation techniques in Latin America—often applied against peasant leaders? What welfare implications do we draw from the increase in such a total?¹⁴ Identifying the 'recipient' also becomes difficult if aid is requested by a minister who is in fact an agent of the donor. The problems of the social scientist are even greater. In the first place, much of the data in current use, especially about Communist countries, consist of 'disinformation' circulated by the agency. Moreover, many major research projects have been initiated, financed and steered by the agency (often without the knowledge of the researchers).

Yet we must not exaggerate the agency's influence. While it is indefensible for social scientists to ignore the CIA, it would also be a mistake to go to the other extreme. In the first place, the material presented here covers only Latin America. It is reasonable to presume that the influence of the agency (or 'company') has been much weaker in other continents, except South-East Asia (and Iran and Zaire). Informal diplomacy à la CIA is certainly practised by agencies of other governments: their invisibility reflects the fact that exposure is more difficult than in the United States. No doubt French intelligence services are highly active in West Africa, and are not only 'gathering data'. But in many countries several agencies must be operating and this very diversity provides the 'host' with a degree of protection (just a diversity in aid or trade reduces economic dependence): casual observation suggests that cooperation even among 'Western' intelligence agencies is cautious. Moreover, local nationalism often has historical

¹⁴ The liberal and humanitarian objectives of aid may in fact be overwhelmed, in the case of donors with major overseas interests, by action to support these interests. Thus while part of USAID may provide technical assistance to land reform agencies, another part may be strengthening the political forces which oppose any genuine land reform.

roots too deep for any foreign agency to be as effective as in many countries of Latin America. And it would be extremely hard to control really large countries, especially India.¹⁵ There have been plenty of well-known CIA 'failures'—notably Cuba, (where they could not manage to assassinate the Prime Minister, even with the help of many marvels of modern science), Eastern Europe and South East Asia and China. These have to be set against the 'successes'.

Moreover, the CIA is only one of the US departments operating in Latin America. Apart from State, Defense,¹⁶ Agriculture and Labor are especially active. Unless one believes in simplistic conspiracy theories it would be a mistake to assume that these always toe the CIA line. (However, under Henry Kissinger CIA-State liaison became close in Washington, eg over Chile.) There is also the private sector. In this book the US multinationals appear as convenient covers for CIA agents on occasion: they actually, however, influence the pattern of development in many other ways, eg by paying out their own bribes and exerting direct pressure themselves, not necessarily always in alliance with the agency, and also by influencing consumption patterns, choice of techniques, etc.

In any case, while the book may correctly describe how CIA officials have perceived their role, we must not confuse this with actuality. The overseas branch of any agency is bound to exaggerate its effectiveness in reports to its headquarters, since these are the basis of decisions on personnel promotion and resource allocation, and eventually comes to believe much of the hyperbole itself. Even the CIA's opponents have reason to overstate its power: this gives them an excuse when they are defeated, as in Chile, or when they remain inactive—and helps their propaganda when they succeed, eg in Cuba. (Analogously the CIA is bound to exaggerate the power of Communism in order to justify its claims on resources and its secrecy.)

In fact, the impact of the CIA may be much less

¹⁵ One would expect (and the book's material is not inconsistent with this expectation) a 'small country effect' as in aid—ie that CIA expenditure *per capita* of the 'host' population would tend to be smaller the larger the population.

¹⁶ In a lecture at Oxford last June, Orlando Letelier, former Defence Minister of Allende, stated that there was mounting evidence that the Defense Intelligence Agency of the United States (the DIA) participated directly in the planning and implementation of the coup in Chile. However, a deal was seemingly struck between Kissinger and Senator Frank Church, head of the Senate Select Committee that investigated CIA actions in Chile, whereby the Ford government would cooperate in providing information about the activities of the CIA on condition that the investigation steered clear of the activities of the DIA. Sr. Letelier was subsequently assassinated in Washington—the evidence suggests that this was done by agents of DINA, the Chilean intelligence agency.

than the reader might assume. Its information-gathering is extensive, but not necessarily efficient. For a station to select and analyse what is relevant from the thousands of tape-hours of monitored conversations must be immensely difficult. We can also infer from the rather crude views quoted—though in this respect the author's reconstructions are somewhat suspect—that CIA staffs are not nearly sufficiently knowledgeable about local situations to play politics with great success. Its personnel are no doubt usually far less sophisticated than their field agents. Indeed the latter must often be able to get away with a mere pretence of activity. They have every reason not to become too dependent on the agency: over the years it must have dawned on agents that CIA policies and thus choice of agents fluctuates with changes in Washington and replacements of local agency personnel. Although severance pay is apparently generous, only a very simple rural policeman could look on the CIA as the source of a secure career for a foreigner.

Even more to the point, those on CIA payrolls must receive money for doing many things they would do anyway. After all, there were military coups before the CIA was born—and the police force of Machado (say) was not exactly composed of gentlemen. The agency can hardly achieve much unless strong local forces share the same objectives.¹⁷ Only in a complex and indeterminate situation (such as, perhaps, Chile in 1973) can its essentially marginal influence be decisive. Nothing in this book should lead a reader to infer that national political forces are analytically irrelevant.

The agency's long-term influence on Latin American governments is still more doubtful. In the first place, this would require consistent secrecy of a sort incompatible with US democratic institutions. In addition, CIA policy-making

functions are constrained by overall policy guidelines which it has limited power to influence. (It may in fact be allowed less autonomy under the Carter administration, at least temporarily, especially in initiating covert action.)

Moreover, the Latin American regimes now being supported may well prove incapable of containing the social pressures which are being generated. If so, the future influence of the agency (and thus the US government) will be weakened by association with political elements, and by the employment of methods which must appear despicable to many of the next generation of Latin American political leaders (as is already the case in Greece). This raises the question whether the national interests of the USA which the agency is supposed to serve, such as military security, might not be better promoted, especially in the longer term, by, for example, switching the bulk of the more than \$1 billion spent on the agency¹⁸ to support commodity prices. (It is unlikely, however, that such crucial cost-benefit analyses are ever carried out.) An even bigger question is how serious the long-term effects will be of undermining the patriotism of many young Americans.

We cannot really judge precisely how the different social sciences should handle the informal sector of diplomacy until we receive more information. We need more defectors from the CIA and other agencies in various countries (including Britain), if only to help us make social science more relevant! I might perhaps conclude, however, that two general propositions (for which other support is not lacking) are confirmed by reading this book. The first is that purely economic analysis is virtually useless, especially at the macro level; the second that in the social sciences quantitative research is often largely irrelevant.

¹⁷ There is an interesting analogy here with other transnational operations. Foreign companies, military missions, technical assistance programmes, etc. cannot operate either without compliant local counterparts.

¹⁸ Machetti and Marks *op. cit.* Chapter 3. Includes money which the authors say is spent on the agency's behalf by Defense, AID, etc. They put the total cost of intelligence at \$6 billion.